The Economic Alliance
Board Meeting
September 23, 2026
Okanogan County Commissioners' Hearing Room

Attending Board Members:

Maria Lassila, 1st Chairman, Tourism Rep. Omak Chamber
Sarah Jo Lightner, 2nd Vice Chair, Arts Comm Rep, Methow Arts
Nick Timm, County Commissioners Rep., Rep. #1, Treasurer
Andy Bertapalle, At-Large #1, Chief Admin Mid Valley Hosp
Monica Garza Acevedo, At-Large #3, WorkSource
Kurt Danison, Secretary, City Rep #1, City Planner
Brent Timm, No Co #1, Tonasket Chamber & TranGO
Lisa Bauer, City Rep. #2, City of Okanogan
Beth Stroshane, At-Large #4,Applied Bldg Information
Lupe Zaragoza for Cindy Simpson, Finance Rep, WAFed

Absent Board Members:

Anthony Popelier, 1st Vice Chair, North Co. #2, Reman & Reload
Crystal Gage, Central Co. #1, Confluence Heath,
Jordan Ruiz, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #2, NNDF
William Marchand, CCT Rep., CCT Planning
Anna Dalbey, Past Chairman, So. Co. #2, Keller Williams Realty
Steve Quick, Central Co. #2, Okanogan School Super
Vacant - At Large #5
Rikki Whipple, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #1, NNDF
Rocklyn Culp, City Rep #2, Town of Winthrop, Planner
Cal Cross, At Large #A2, WVC
Lanie Johns, Ok Co Commissioners Rep. #2,
Jord Wilson, South County #1, City of Pateros
Jon Brown, Methow Valley #1, Twisp Works
Vacant - Colville Tribal Federal Corp. Rep

Guests/Staff:

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Ex. Director, Economic Alliance
Leonel Marcial, Business Outreach Specialist, Economic Alliance
Shannon Smith, SBDC Business Advisor
Mason Duke, E. Dev. Specialist, Economic Alliance
Carolyn Davis, Project Assistant, Economic Alliance

Maria Lassila, Chairman, called the meeting to order and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Agenda: No conflicts with the agenda items and no changes.

Consent Agenda: Minutes from August 26, 2026, were emailed out and financials as of September 16, 2026, were sent. Brent Timm made a motion to approve the minutes, and the financials as presented, Nick Timm seconded. Motion passed with no one opposed or abstained.

Presentation: Community Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) Update: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the CEDs is a working document and reported that the Economic Alliance has been working on some of the goals of the CEDS. She gave a brief outline of some of the activities.
1.1 – Align CEDS with Community, Economic Development, and Public Infrastructure Prioritization Process via Annual Updates: A recent workshop was held to outline the Prioritization Process and 11 people attended. The deadline for Letters of Intent (LOI) is September 30th, and we expect there to be a lot of applicants since there are funds to distribute this year. These funds are for shovel ready projects for public infrastructure projects that create jobs. Full applications are due at the end of October, and presentations are scheduled for November 17.
1.2 Advertise regional commercial properties for sale or lease on the Economic Alliance website: The Economic Alliance's web site has a list of properties that are for sale or lease. This is updated regularly and is a good site to look at for a place to house your business.
1.5 – 1.6 Embrace and expand the Creative Economy cluster as core target industry for the County: Support arts education through local partnerships and sustainable funding efforts: Sarah Jo Lightner reported that she is putting together a one-day conference "Make Art Work". This will help cottage industries that want to move into a downtown business. She is also looking for training for board members for creative businesses. Step Art also known as Methow Arts has a new facility in Okanogan.

Nick Timm stated that the Irrigation District spoke to the county commissioners about lack of water, could also impact orchard/ag business. We need snowpack to replenish underground aquifers and learn how to be "water efficient".
2.2 Collaborate with the Okanogan County Tourism Council (OCTC) in investing in external marketing for selected recreational assets in the North Region. This is ongoing.
2.3 Advocate for expansion of the American Viticultural Area (AVA) to include Okanogan Valley: Mason Duke has been researching this topic and gave a brief outline of what would have to be done to certified as an AVA.
3.1 Invest in the Economic Alliance website to keep the events page updated, enhance connection to tourism resources, and add more content on target industries. **3.2** Enhance connectivity between the OCTC website (Okanogan Country) and the Economic Alliance to increase visibility of economic development opportunities for investors and business owners visiting the County: OCTC does currently advertise outside of the area and has a focus, as directed by the LTAC, to promote the North County area. Need to make sure that the OCTC web site is also linked to the Economic Alliance web site.
3.8 & 4.1 Work with the Okanogan County Farmers Market Association to revitalize and support flexible, seasonal vending opportunities and micro retail growth – Sarah Jo Lightner spoke about investing in young people and getting more people engaged in the committee. Suggested bringing back an entrepreneurship contest. Also thought the Rotary sponsored two students from Business Week to go to Nationals. Maria Lassila spoke about the lack of certified teachers in the school districts. Suggested coming up with a scholarship to help teachers further their education. She volunteered the Omak Chamber as a pilot program for the Omak School District.

Motions: No motions.

Reports
Executive Director Report: (see attachment #1)
Roni Holder-Diefennbach reported that she has continued to work with the Loomis Fire District and attended a meeting with the Fire District and Commissioner Hover. They have the first design for their firehall and are working on the second design. The contractor is working on the NEPA.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach introduced Shannon Smith as the newly hired SBDC Business Advisor. Shannon Smith stated she is happy to be part of the team. Previously she has worked in the medical field, owned a construction business, and currently has a small farm outside of Tonasket. She is a certified bookkeeper and is working on completing her SBDC training to become a Certified Business Advisor.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she attended the Association of Washington Businesses in Spokane and the CERB meeting in Olympia. The AWB Policy Summit was a great opportunity to learn more about programs and policies that directly impact local businesses. The CERB meeting resulted in allocating over $6 million in funding for projects.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach also reported that she is working on the 2027 budget. She also wanted the Board input on if we should develop a new logo for the Economic Alliance. It was the consensus to move forward.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach also reported that at the last meeting Rachel McClure spoke about the contamination of former orchard lands. Roni Holder-Diefenbach is doing a little investigation to see what would need to be done for these properties as there is a significant amount of property in Okanogan County that are in these zones.

Election of Board Members & Officers for 2027
Kurt Danison volunteered to head up the nomination committee.

Infrastructure Committee: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported the prioritization process was moving forward. There were 12 individuals that join the infrastructure overview workshop. We will probably have a huge influx of projects for this prioritization process because there is actual funding available, not just the prioritization ranking.

Business Education/Outreach: Mason Duke reported that he attended the Farm Bureau meeting, the poverty simulation workshop that was held in Omak and had a booth at the Resource Fair. He is putting together a couple of workshops, for next week, Access to Capital is on October 6th and the Start Simple class is on October 7th. He also has been meeting with clients that are interested in starting a business.

Leonel Marcial reported that he is still visiting orchardists that are struggling. In will be going to Yakima for conference on innovation on October 20th.

Breanna Sollender is working on social media posts to help spread the word about the activities of the Economic Alliance and what help is available through the office. She is still in need of Board member's Bios from some Board members, please send to her at Breanna@economic-alliance.com

Discussion

Board Member Recruitment: Still have two positions on the Board that are vacant. The At-Large Position #5 and the CTFC representative.

Port District: No updates.

Technical Training & Education Committee: No report.

Broadband – No report.

Other Business/News/Member Updates

Maria Lassila reported that there is a candidate forum on September 29 & 30 in Omak at the Red Omak Theater.

The IACC meeting is schedule for October 20 – 23 in Wenatchee.

Meeting adjourned, 1:05 p.m.

Next meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2026 via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Davis

Roni Holder-Diefenbach Executive Director



ECONOMIC ALLIANCE
Executive Director Report
September 2026

SBDC Update-We have hired Shannon Smith as our new part-time SBDC Advisor, and she will be starting on Monday the 21st. We will be working with the SBDC to coordinate our schedules to get her CBA training started so we can have a fully certified business advisor. I have purchased a new laptop for her as she will be working in office and out in the field mtg with clients. I also bought myself a new laptop to replace my possessed one that randomly starts to scroll during presentations. We will also enter into a MOU with the Tri Cities Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to engage their Spanish Speaking Advisor.

Infrastructure Workshop-We had 12 individuals join the infrastructure overview workshop, many of whom will most likely submit applications through the process this year. All will be new applicants, and some will be partnering with their local communities to submit their applications.

OCTC Contract-We are in discussions with OCTC regarding our annual MOU and what that will look like moving forward. They are looking at hire a ¾ position that will remove the administrative duties that we have provided over the last 20+ years. Moving forward, our MOU might just be us providing them space for their employees to operate out of. I have reached out to the Executive Board at OCTC to get their decision as soon as possible, so I can start planning the 2027 Budget

Loomis Fire District-The Consultant contract is signed, design has started, we are still mtg with CDBG on some details/NEPA. Commissioner Hover is attending mtgs and working to help the fire district make decisions. We are working on facilitating training with commissioner staff and CDBG to take over contract requirements for all CDBG contracts that the county has.

LOI-Are due September 30th and I have already started receiving them, as well as mtg with individual communities/organizations to talk them through the process. Mason and I have been available to answer questions and clarify things with them as they come up. I have also been working on filling vacant infrastructure committee members and have filled the 2 positions that needed updated representation. We will be sending the LOI's to the Infrastructure Committee for their review. They will have a short turn around and we will send the applications to all those selected to submit full applications.

AWB/CERB Mtg-I attended the AWB in Spokane earlier this week and the CERB mtg in Olympia. The AWB Policy Summit was a great opportunity to learn more about programs and policies that directly impact local businesses. There was a lot of discussion regarding WA state tax structure, the impacts that new taxes and regulations are impacting them and the research that is being done to track the data. Lieutenant Gov Heck , facilitated a panel with business leaders on the new Economic Development Council, which was a great panel to learn more about what the council will be working on. CERB Mtg-we heard about new projects coming in and added a new tier4 funding for site readiness including NEPA/SEPA and engineering and design. I will share the information with the eligible entities in the county.

Community Economic Revitalization Board
Washington Economic Development Association
Partners for Rural Washington
CCT & Okanogan County BAT